

The History of Stiltsville

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Jim Adams
Cultural Resource Specialist
Biscayne National Park

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Introduction¹

This report is a history of *Stiltsville*, which is a cultural area located within the northern boundaries of Biscayne National Park. Stiltsville is the location of several houses that are placed on stilts or barges within the shallow waters of Biscayne Bay, roughly one mile to the south of Cape Florida. These houses, predominately used for weekend recreation, are on submerged lands that are leased from the National Park Service, previously leased from the State of Florida. The leases are due to expire in 1999, and the present plan does not call for renewing their leases. At this time abandoned houses and wrecks in Stiltsville are being removed. The area is being restored to a natural condition. The remaining houses, upon expiration of their leases, would also be removed at that time.²

History of the "Stiltsville" Area: Abstracts of Local Newspapers 1896 - 1974 (Helmers, n.d.) provided an excellent starting point for research. This listing enabled further detailed reading of articles that pertained specifically to Stiltsville, and are located in the Miami main public library. Found in the Miami Herald were forty-five articles from 1940 to 1975 that reported on Stiltsville alone, not including numerous other articles about Biscayne Bay. Reviewing these articles not only reports what was occurring in Stiltsville, but reading the reporter's actual prose gives insight into contemporaneous feelings regarding Stiltsville's unique culture. Much color was recorded in these articles. A liberal use of quotations from these articles will help to depict the history of Stiltsville and it will give an appreciation for local feelings at the time. A more complete listing with annotations and quotations is provided in Appendix B for further reference.

On file with the Visitor Protection Division, Biscayne National Park, are the lease records of the house sites from the State of Florida. These records provided historical information on dates of leases, construction dates, building permits, names of lessees, correspondence between lessees and the lessor, photographs, etc. Resource Management Division, Biscayne National, has historical aerial photographs of the north end of the park that includes the subject area.

There are presently seven structures remaining that are supported by concrete pilings approximately nine feet above the water.³ These are of varying sizes, ranging from approximately 40 x 30 ft. to 80 x 50 ft. The houses are of vernacular style, with a mixture of some elements of Bungalow/Craftsman, and an occasional Mansard roof. The houses include varying decks, attached sheds, and docks. The only commonality between the structures is that

¹ The content of this paper has not changed from the 1996 version. Typographical corrections were made and a reference to a draft report was updated. Appendix A timeline includes a few new entries.

² This referred to the post Hurricane Andrew cleanup of abandoned sites that was occurring in 1996 at the time of the writing of the original paper.

³ The original paper erroneously referenced six structures.

they are all on the water supported by pilings. They are the rebuilt structures that remained after Hurricane Andrew visited in 1992. In past years, some of the previous structures were on barges that were grounded on the shallow mud flats. There is no single event or structure in Stiltsville's history that would distinguish it, instead it is the combination of structures and events that represents part of the cultural history of the larger Miami region.

Historical Background

The natural channels through the sand bars that are to the south of Cape Florida used to be the only way into northern Biscayne Bay, into what is now the Miami Harbor area. Prior to the dredging of Government Cut Channel in the early part of this century, *the bars at the entrance of the bay* were the greatest hazard for ships entering the area. As ships increased in size, the hazard increased. By the 1920s, the major shipping traffic was diverted to the newly constructed Government Cut freeing up the area that later became Stiltsville (Helmert, n.d.).

Biscayne National Park: Historic Resource Study has developed a historic context "Recreational Development of Miami and Biscayne Bay."⁴ As Carl Fisher developed Miami Beach in the 1910s and 1920s interest in Biscayne Bay grew. Even though most of these were not completed various developers in the first half of the twentieth century planned to expand shorelines in lower Biscayne Bay and to create artificial islands. Stiltsville is a reflection of this development (Leynes & Cullison 1998).

The *Historic Resource Study* (HRS) further details the development of Elliott Key, Boca Chita, and areas to the south of Stiltsville. This was part of a larger development pattern of the South as a Millionaire's Retreat. Since 1886, prior to the development of south Florida as a winter vacation resort, such places as Georgia's Jekyll Island had already given the southern coast a reputation as the retreat of millionaire industrialists. As this reputation expanded, many members of high society made sojourns to the south during the winter months. This trend resulted in the further development of southern Florida in the early 20th century.

The HRS shows that as Miami Beach developed for tourism and recreation, so did the keys that are now within Biscayne National Park.

Recent studies have focused on Boca Chita and the keys to the south for their development during this period. Ignored or over looked is what happened to the north. Not commonly known, Soldier Key was the site of a hotel built at the turn of the century (Adams & Helmert 1996) and then the development of Stiltsville. These activities can be included in the same historic theme.

⁴ This replaces the original reference in the 1996 Stiltsville History paper which referred to draft *Historic Resource Study: Biscayne National Park* (Crowder 1993) which was replaced by the final historic resource study, Leynes & Cullison (1998). The interpretation of this section has not changed.

History of Stiltsville

Stiltsville has a unique and colorful history. The sixty years that Stiltsville has existed may not seem long in one respect. When you consider that the City of Miami is only now celebrating its centennial, and when placed in context with the development of Miami Beach and the resort period, which began in earnest in 1916, Stiltsville has always been a part of Miami's history.

The first *shack* at Stiltsville was built sometime in the 1930s (prior to 1937) by *Crawfish* Eddie Walker. Similar to the houses seen today, *Crawfish Eddie's shack* was a one story structure supported above the water on stilts. Eddie was well known for his *chilau*; a crawfish chowder made from the crawfish that he caught in the local waters. Friends would boat out to his "home" for an evening meal. The idea spread, and in 1937, *Crawfish Eddie* had his first neighbors when his close friends Thomas Grady, who was the city rate and traffic consultant, L. L. Lee, the city manager, and Leo Edwards, an automobile dealer, decided to build their own shack. The idea spread, Stiltsville was born. By April 1945, there were twelve private *shacks* and two clubs located on the mud flats approximately one mile south of Cape Florida (*Miami Herald*, 1 Apr. 1945).

Prior to 1940, newspaper articles reported on normal shipping activities, such as shipwrecks, channel dredging, etc., that occurred in the waters adjacent to Cape Florida. Stiltsville did not gain its notoriety until the first social club, the Quarterdeck, was opened. The Miami Herald first referred to Stiltsville in January 1940, when it reported that Quarterdeck Club was to be constructed in Biscayne Bay for sportsmen. With an estimated cost of \$40,000, the 140 x 80 foot clubhouse would have a sun deck and a T-Head wharf. Membership would be by invitation only. After the opening of the Quarterdeck in September 1940, a feature article in the Miami Herald provided many photographs that illustrated the impressive and exotic nature of the club. Little children fishing on the club's docks were one of the activities shown. In the background of the photographs can be seen the other shacks of Stiltsville. The tone of the article was favorable towards the Quarterdeck.

Life on the houses in Biscayne Bay is the focus of a large photographic feature article in December 1940. Some of the captions read:

Upon the bay bottoms of lower Biscayne Bay some 11 miles off shore has risen a city on stilts, a playland where hundreds spend their weekends fishing and indulging in water sports.

Most pretentious of the abodes along the water waste is the newly-built Quarterdeck Club and it is the center of social life in that region.

Here is one of the colloquially name *tumble downs*, otherwise a bay shack. The *tumble downs* have all conveniences excepting telephones, and though some of them may appear crude they give comfort.

... demonstrates how residents of the *tumble downs* engage in the quiet art of angling while reposing in bed.

This article illustrates that early on Stiltsville gained a reputation for its uniqueness and it also demonstrates the linkage with the development of recreation in the Miami area.

Not all were in favor of Stiltsville's growth though. An April 1941 (Miami Herald), article reported that Deering's attorney objected to the stilt-supported resorts and the expansion that the two social clubs were proposing. He felt that clubs, fishing houses, and shacks were *hot spots* and that they would grow worse as time went on; they already *constitute a menace to property to the north of Cape Florida and to the west on the mainlands*.

Between December 1940 and September 1941, the Quarterdeck Club was the focus of many pages in the social section of the Miami Herald's Sunday paper. Numerous photographs and articles described parties and sporting events at the club. It was portrayed as a country club atmosphere where the social elite, or those hoping to join their ranks, wanted to be seen. *Fun and Laughter Rolls On Sea Waves As Miami Civic Leaders Stage Fellowship Party At Quarterdeck Club Wednesday. ... There were waves of fun and laughter at sea off Miami Wednesday afternoon, and the funsters were Miami Chamber of Commerce members at the Quarterdeck club..* (Miami Herald, 6/12/1941).

Stiltsville gains worldwide recognition as the Quarterdeck club is regarded as one of the key attractions for Miami Beach. The Miami Herald reports on the selling of the Quarterdeck in October 1943:

Miami's famed Quarterdeck Club... has been purchased... Thousands of Miamians and visitors have enjoyed the facilities of the club located in Biscayne Bay.

Brilliant ceremony marked the opening of the club in November 1940, and until the United States entered the war it was one of the most popular spots in the Miami area.

It was a favored spot, not only with sea-minded Miamians but with winter visitors from all over the world. It was customary to see yachts from all over the country tied up at the Quarterdeck docks.

The Quarterdeck Club also proved useful in gaining publicity for the Miami area. Pictures of celebrities enjoying themselves at the club were given nation-wide circulation, usually carrying the caption that it was a \$250,000 Robinson Crusoe layout. In reality it cost only \$40,000.

This article links Stiltsville to the development of the historic Miami resort theme.

The end of the 1940s tarnishes the high-class image of the Quarterdeck. In early 1950, Warren Freeman, a noted hotelman, purchased the Quarterdeck and attempted to operate the

club legitimately as a high-class cocktail lounge and restaurant. After sustaining heavy damage in the hurricane of 1950, Freeman sold the club. Suspected of gambling for sometime, the most famous raid on the club was in 1954, and was personally led by the Sheriff of Dade County. The local Junior Commerce was sponsoring a private party that night. Found were strippers, lewd literature, and gambling. In 1955, the Miami Herald referred to the *famed and oft-raided Quarterdeck Club*.

Even though there was scandal attached to its notoriety, this added to the glamour and attraction that local Miamians held for Stiltsville. Stiltsville continued to be a major feature of the Miami Herald from 1959 to 1964. Its regional flavor is captured in selected quotations from these articles:

Getting away from it all - right in big and blustering Dade County - still is possible. It's done every weekend by the little group who have *camps* aboard barges anchored on the flats around the Quarterdeck Club, just south of Cape Florida.

The Quarterdeck Club, with its colorful history, got its permit right after World War II. In those days of a *liberal policy* here, and frequent wide open gambling, the story went out that it was to be a deluxe gaming operation.

It's popular on weekends with the boat-owning members...

...stories of *Crawfish Eddie* and his long-time institution - his shack was swept away in the 1950 hurricane...

Colorful Quarterdeck Club Meets a Blazing Death (headline, November 6, 1961)

Twenty-one years of checkered history ended in a burst of flames Tuesday for the frequently raided Quarterdeck Club...

Little remained except blackened pilings of the *club* that was opened with swank and fanfare in 1940, reputedly in the hope of making it an offshore extension of the wide open gambling then common here.

The go-ahead for a big operation never came. But occasional tilting of the lid on gambling led to many police raids there for everything from quickie crap games to girlie shows and suspected liquor violations.

Tea dances in the midst of balmy Biscayne Bay, the family yacht tied up alongside, the expectation of perhaps a game of chance - that was the picture that never completely developed for the Quarterdeck Club out on the flats south of Key Biscayne.

The end of 1964 viewed Stiltsville viewed with a sense of nostalgia. It had become part of local folklore and colorful stories abounded.

The year 1965 is a turning point in the history of Stiltsville. It is a year of change that brought the Bikini Club, more raids and scandals, state leases, Hurricane Betsy, building codes, and *family respectability*.

In March, a banner headline proclaims *Bikini Babies Abound in Stiltsville*. An inset box starts off the report:

Story of a Renegade Village. On mudflats off Key Biscayne, you find a renegade village where there are no taxes or codes. In this report, Staffer Jon Nordheimer tells you about Stiltsville, a weekend retreat for the sophisticated, including a millionaire, developer, business executives, and politicians (Miami Herald 3/7/65).

This is a lengthy article about life in Biscayne Bay, where *there is a strange place where Pierre is king*. Pierre, who seems to gloat in his somewhat sleazy characterization, is the owner of the Bikini Club. He opened the club in 1962. The Bikini Club was a yacht that he grounded on the flats and turned into a social club. Other vessels, such as a military surplus World War II patrol boat was added to increase the dance floor. Just as popular and extremely colorful, but the Bikini Club did not have the same level of sophistication that the Quarterdeck Club had during its opening years. Opinions varied, depending on ones' visions of romantic sentiment or officialdom, from whether Stiltsville was an offbeat change of pace from Miami, or an unsightly, renegade community living outside the law.

In July, the club is raided. A headline announces: *Agents Leave Bikini Club High, Dry* (7/25/65).

State Beverage agents crashed the Bikini Club on tranquil Biscayne Bay Saturday and left the mudflat mecca stripped of its jaunty proprietor known as Pierre, and all refreshments. ...The Bikini has been the neighborhood bar of Stiltsville, a cluster of spindly-legged shanties south of Cape Florida, for about a year.

It may be ill fame, but the fame and recognition of Stiltsville continued to grow (refer to Appendix B for more extensive quotations from this article).

A cleanup of Stiltsville had been proposed, but even with this recent scandal the popularity of Stiltsville lives. The day after the raid a new banner headline announces *Stiltsville Given a Reprieve As the "Clean-Up" Bogs Down*.

There's good news today for the salty citizens of Stiltsville. ...Stiltsville is that cluster of rickety and semi-plush weekend hideaways built on pilings in shoal water just off the southern tip of Key Biscayne. ...Just how many there are depends upon which weekend you visit the site. Three of the site-occupiers have state leases permitting them to live... The others come and go or are washed away (Miami Herald 7/26/65).

The folklore of Stiltsville seems to provide some protection from officialdom, although bureaucracy makes ingress when the state decides that all Stiltsville owners will have to sign leases in August.

By July of this year, the residents of the homes in Stiltsville are trying to distance themselves from the image of the notorious clubs. One owner wrote to the Trustees of Internal Improvement Fund (state agency) *to protest the unfavorable publicity and misconceptions about our homes on pilings in South Biscayne Bay*. The homeowners, mainly professional people trying to escape for the weekends, would be willing to pay for leases, rent, etc., as long as they would be allowed to remain in Stiltsville. They would agree to keep their homes well maintained and to not be a detriment to the bay area (Southard 1965).

This is followed by a lengthy feature article that filled the first two pages of the Women's section (Miami Herald 8/22/65); *Getting Away From It In the Stiltsville Way*.

Some of the casual-minded residents of a suburban colony of Miamians like to rake up in front of their houses on Sundays. Nothing unusual about that? There is when the "lawn" is Biscayne Bay's sandy bottom three feet under water. ...out at that unique get-away-from-it-all colony called Stiltsville. ...High in the shallow water in unpretentious-looking frame houses atop barges or pilings within sight of Key Biscayne's Cape Florida light dwell solid citizens like lawyers and state representatives, policemen and restaurant owners and university professors.

"We're a family type colony," says Judge Knuck, "not a scruffy bunch of squatters. There's been too much sensational talk about antics at the nearby Bikini Club."

Still, the rollicking nearly tax free stilt colony (which doesn't like to call itself Stiltsville and is casting about for a classier name) is sort of a Southern counterpart of New York's Fire Island in the color and diversity of living preferences on view.

The article prominently features one of the owners, Francis Knuck, Circuit Judge, State of Florida. Photographs depict a tropical escape with captions that read: *Stiltsville Homes Have Character... ...Some Cost a Tidy Sum... ...With Decor from Rustic... ...To Wall To Wall Carpeting...* Three weeks later Hurricane Betsy hits Miami and Stiltsville (September 1965).

After the hurricane the state agreed that Stiltsville owners would have to comply with county building codes. Building permits would be necessary. Property owners would now have to have leases and pay rent to the state for use of the bottomlands. Only structures that had at least 50 % remaining were authorized to be repaired. No new structures were to be built. After the rebuild, Stiltsville now had seventeen houses or *shacks*. The famed Bikini Club is not among the survivors.

In October 1966, the remains of the Bikini Club burns to the waterline. Later that month the state rejects a proposal for a yacht club to be built in Stiltsville.

Institution of the lease system has ended the use of commercial clubs in Stiltsville as evidenced in a series of letters in 1967. A Stiltsville owner, Judge Knuck, reports to the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, that Karl Mongelluzzo, who had previously owned the Quarterdeck Club when it burned down, was intending to operate his campsite (this is how the state officially classifies the house sites) as the new Quarterdeck Club. The residents of Stiltsville find this unacceptable (Knuck 1967). The state officially informs Mongelluzzo that he will not be permitted to operate his lease for commercial purposes (Williams 1967). Mr. Mongelluzzo sells his lease in 1970.

Stiltsville is again popularized in a two page Sunday feature article in April 1968. *Started With Shacks, It Now Has 'Class' ... Future Goth Of 'Sea City' Is Remote ... Stiltsville No Longer A Community of Shacks ...*

Stiltsville homes have lost some of their 'chicken-coop' design in recent years such as the one in foreground with mansard-style roof and shake shingles...

Unofficially dubbed the city of Stiltsville, the weekend retreats are perched atop pilings in the shallow bay waters south of Key Biscayne. But there's little trace of the pioneering, weather beaten fishing shacks that once dotted the area.

In fact, Stiltsville is getting down right toney. When Hurricane Betsy churned up the bay several years ago its salty citizens were forced into an "urban renewal program" that has almost erased the city's slums.

The *Tropic Magazine* of the Miami Herald continues to dramatize Stiltsville over the years. In October 1969, Stiltsville is characterized as *A watering hole for the rich*. Extensive coverage was in a June 1975, feature that used a party given by one of the Stiltsville residences as the backdrop to describe life present and past in Stiltsville.

It is not exactly inconspicuous, being 17 spindly-legged houses sitting in plain sight of Key Biscayne in a few feet of water... Seventeen houses, most of them just the slightest bit tatty the way second or third homes usually are, are up on pilings sunk expensively 18 feet into bedrock.

If you flew over Stiltsville - and if you lived there you could probably afford to do so anytime you wanted - you'd see the 17 houses standing there patiently, fairly close together, and you might imagine it is a kind of community, a rich folks' commune where people are all together. Some people even speak of it as a community, and everyone you meet names a different honorary mayor - a post that appears to be awarded arbitrarily and according to private standards. At least there have been named in the press: Jimmy Ellenberg, a Realtor; Judge Francis X. Knuck; and William Daniel, owner of an electrical contracting firm. To the people here today, Smalley is undoubtedly a mayoral figure too. But Stiltsville is not really a community. Each house is a nucleus of activity for the friends and family of its owner, and each style of living is different - some

mostly family life, some business and political entertaining, some generalized fantasy fun, like Smalley's place - and while visiting back and forth at dull times is common, or to borrow a jug of whiskey, the visiting is casual and usually short-lived.

What is significant in this article is the physical description of the Stiltsville and its continued role in the historic theme of Miami's resort development. More extensive quotations from these two features can be found in Appendix B.

From a real estate appraisal in 1976: *I've been familiar with Stiltsville for approximately 29 years and have observed these clubhouses on many occasions... The subject houses and location are unique.*

A timeline of events in Stiltsville is provided in Appendix A. More extensive abstracts and notations of all newspaper articles related to Stiltsville is provided in Appendix B.

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1967 Letter to Karl Mongeluzo, owner of Campsite Lease No. 2167. Dated May 24, 1967. Copy on file with Visitor Protection Division, Biscayne National Park.

APPENDIX A - STILTSVILLE TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

1896	Henry Flagler extends the Florida East Coast Railway to Miami and builds the <i>Royal Palm Hotel</i> .
1912-1916	Carl Fisher develops Miami Beach.
pre 1920s	Ship traffic into Miami Harbor is around the southern tip of Cape Florida - the area that will later become Stiltsville.
prior 1937	The first <i>shack</i> in Stiltsville is built by <i>Crawfish Eddie</i> Walker.
1937	The second <i>shack</i> in Stiltsville is built by friends of <i>Crawfish Eddie</i> ; - Grady, Lee, & Edwards (they were all fishermen).
1940	Stiltsville's first private club opens in November; the <i>Quarterdeck Club</i> .
post 1940	The second club, the <i>Swan</i> was built. It later changed its name to the <i>Probus</i> .
1945	There are twelve private <i>shacks</i> and two clubs in Stiltsville.
post WWII	Stiltsville continues to grow.
1949	<i>Quarterdeck Club</i> is raided, but no evidence of gambling is found.
1950	Warren Freeman, a noted hotelman, purchases the <i>Quarterdeck Club</i> and attempts to legitimize the business into a high-class operation. Sustains major damage in a hurricane in the same year, and sells the club.
1950	The original Stiltsville shack built by <i>Crawfish Eddie</i> is lost in a hurricane.
1950s	There are proposals to develop the upper keys and to build a causeway from Key Biscayne to Soldier Key, Ragged Keys, Sands Key, and Elliott Key.
1950s	As Key Biscayne grows, the residents complain of the eyesore that Stiltsville presents. They refer to the Stiltsville residents as squatters and complain that they do not pay taxes.
early 1960s	State of Florida considers moving the Stiltsville residents out.
1960	Stiltsville has its largest population, twenty-seven buildings.

1960	After Hurricane Donna seven structures are left.
1961	<i>Quarterdeck Club</i> burns down on November 6.
1962	Pierre opens the <i>Bikini Club</i> .
1965	This is a turning point in the history of Stiltsville – a year of change that included more raids, scandals, the inauguration of the state lease system, building codes, family respectability, and Hurricane Betsy.
1965 (July)	State Beverage Dept. raids <i>Bikini Club</i> and temporarily closes it.
1965 (Aug)	Owners now have to sign leases with the State.
1960 to 1965	Stiltsville rebuilds between Hurricanes Donna and Betsy.
1965 (Sept)	Hurricane Betsy destroys most of Stiltsville. No new construction permits are allowed. Only houses with less than 50% damage can be repaired. Seventeen structures remain.
1965 (Sept)	After Hurricane Betsy, Dade County requires enforcement of building codes in Stiltsville.
1965 (Sept)	<i>Bikini Club</i> is damaged beyond repair by Hurricane Betsy and does not reopen.
1966 (July)	Since November 1965 the number of residents in Stiltsville increases by 240%.
1966 (Oct)	The remains of the <i>Bikini Club</i> burn to the waterline.
1967	The last owner of the <i>Quarterdeck Club</i> , Karl Mongelluzzo, is prevented from building a new <i>Quarterdeck Club</i> .
1967	Institution of the lease system ended the use of commercial clubs in Stiltsville. The state no longer allows commercial operation of the leased campsites.
1968	“Stiltsville homes have lost some of their ‘chicken-coop’ design in recent years... In fact, Stiltsville is getting down right toney. When Hurricane Betsy churned up the bay several years ago its salty citizens were forced into an “urban renewal program” that has almost erased the city’s slums.” Series of quotes from Miami Herald news articles.
1969	Seventeen structures are present in Stiltsville
1969	“A watering hole for the rich.” <i>Tropic Magazine</i> .

- 1975 “We’re a family-type colony, not a scruffy bunch of squatters. The neighborhood has changed radically in the past few years. Now it looks like Millionaire’s Row.” quote by Judge Knuck, a resident of Stiltsville.
- 1980 Biscayne National Park’s northern boundaries are expanded. The area where Stiltsville is located is now within the National Park.
- 1992 Fourteen campsites or structures are present in Stiltsville prior to Hurricane Andrew .
- 1992 Hurricane Andrew leaves seven campsites or structures intact in Stiltsville.

APPENDIX B - ANNOTATED ABSTRACTS FROM NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

This appendix provides an annotated listing of articles from the Miami Herald that pertain to Stiltsville from 1940 to 1975. Page and section is provided in brackets [] at the beginning of the annotation. This listing provides an expansion of the annotations and quotations that was first compiled in Helmers (n.d.).

Date	[page/section]	Abstract
Jan. 28, 1940	[3C]	Club (Quarterdeck) to be erected in Biscayne Bay for sportsman. Costing \$40,000, will be 80 x 140 feet, sun deck, clubhouse, and T-Head wharf. Membership to be by invitation.
Sept. 22, 1940	[1C]	Photographs of the Quarterdeck Club. Photographs provide an exotic and impressive view of building. Other photos of “shacks” in the area. Photographs of activities, to include children fishing at the Quarterdeck Club. A favorable article.
Dec. 8, 1940	[In Photogravure]	<p>Photographs of live in Stiltsville, although this term is not used. Some of the captions read:</p> <p>“Upon the bay bottoms of lower Biscayne Bay some 11 miles off shore has risen a city on stilts, a playland where hundreds spend their weekends fishing and indulging in water sports.”</p> <p>“Most pretentious of the abodes along the water waste is the newly-built Quarterdeck Club and it is the center of social life in that region.”</p> <p>“Here is one of the colloquially name <i>tumble downs</i>, otherwise a bay shack. The <i>tumble downs</i> have all conveniences excepting telephones, and though some of them may appear crude they give comfort.”</p> <p>“... demonstrates how residents of the <i>tumble downs</i> engage in the quiet art of angling while reposing in bed.”</p> <p>Photographs are favorable and colorful.</p>
April 2, 1941	[16A]	Deering’s attorney objects to the stilt-supported resorts on the tidal flats off Cape Florida. He protests the “Sea-going” Club and the Quarterdeck Club. Both of these clubs were applying for permits to expand. He refers to the clubs, fishing houses, and shacks as “hot spots.”

He says that they will grow worse as time goes on and that they already “constitute a menace to property to the north of Cape Florida and to the west on the mainlands.”

April 27, 1941 [1D] A photograph of the houseboat *Shangri-La* moored to the Quarterdeck Club.

June 12, 1941 [1B] “Fun and Laughter Rolls On Sea Waves As Miami Civic Leaders Stage Fellowship Party At Quarterdeck Club Wednesday.”

“There were waves of fun and laughter at sea off Miami Wednesday afternoon, and the funsters were Miami Chamber of Commerce members at the Quarterdeck club.”

Aug. 10, 1941 [3B] Boat racing at the Quarterdeck Club. Photographs.

Sept. 21, 1941 [1B] Photographs of activities at the Quarterdeck Club.

June 19, 1942 [5A] Bales of crude and leaf rubber are salvaged from the waters near the Quarterdeck Club and Rock harbor. Photographs.

Oct. 24, 1943 [3D] Quarterdeck Club is Sold. “Miami’s famed Quarterdeck Club... has been purchased... . Thousands of Miamians and visitors have enjoyed the facilities of the club located in Biscayne Bay.”

“Brilliant ceremony marked the opening of the club in November 1940, and until the United States entered the war it was one of the most popular spots in the Miami area.”

“It was a favored spot, not only with sea-minded Miamians but with winter visitors from all over the world. It was customary to see yachts from all over the country tied up at the Quarterdeck docks.”

“The Quarterdeck Club also proved useful in gaining publicity for the Miami area. Pictures of celebrities enjoying themselves at the club were given nation-wide circulation, usually carrying the caption that it was a \$250,000 Robinson Crusoe layout. In reality it cost only \$40,000.”

April 1, 1945 [5B] An article on the history of Stiltsville. The first stilt house was built by Eddie Walker (sometime prior to 1937). Then in 1937, Grady, Lee, & Edwards got together and built the second house. They were friends with Walker. All were fishermen. The idea then spread and more appeared.

The Quarterdeck Club was the first club built; followed by the Swan. Swan later changed its name to Probus.

June 5, 1945	[1b] A charter for the Quarterdeck Club is signed.
Dec. 3, 1945	[16] Photograph of the Quarterdeck Club from air. It was the only building on stilts in Biscayne Bay that with stood the September hurricane.
Dec. 22, 1945	[1B] A houseboat burns and sinks near the Quarterdeck Club.
Nov. 26, 1947	[1D] The bay bottom lease for the Quarterdeck Club is reduced from \$1000 to \$100 per acre per year.
Feb. 3, 1952	[21E] Extensive photo story on the Quarterdeck Club.
June 22, 1954	[1A] The Quarterdeck Club is raided by the Sheriff of Dade County. Party sponsored by the Junior Commerce. Sheriff found strippers, lewd literature, and gambling. Article tells of previous raid in 1949 when no evidence of gambling was found then.
June 23, 1954	[1C] More on the Quarterdeck Club raid. Photos accompany story. Interviews with deputies and participants.
Aug. 7, 1954	[1B] The Quarterdeck loses its liquor license because of the raid in June.
March 10, 1955	[1B] The "famed and often-raided Quarterdeck Club" is back in business after having its liquor licensee returned.
April 4, 1956	[1A] The 65 foot charter boat <i>Phantom</i> capsizes in the bay while enroute to the Quarterdeck Club. Photographs.
Nov. 8, 1959	[4B] "Getting way from it all - right in big and blustering Dade County - still is possible. It's done every weekend by the little group who have <i>camps</i> aboard barges anchored on the flats around the Quarterdeck Club, just south of Cape Florida."

"No ringing telephones. No problem with the neighbor's kids. It's dandy."

"The floating, or sometimes slightly aground camps down there are owned by some of the area's best known citizens."

"The Quarterdeck Club, with its colorful history, got its permit right after World War II. In those days of a *liberal policy* here, and frequent wide open gambling, the story went out that it was to be a deluxe gaming operation." (Note: The Quarterdeck actually was opened in 1940 before World War II began.)

"That deal never got off the ground. Slot machines were tried briefly, and then the law cracked down."

“After it became *strictly legit*, hotelman Warren Freeman bought it early in 1950 and operated it as a high class cocktail lounge and restaurant. The place was badly battered by the hurricane of 1950.”

“It’s popular on weekends with the boat-owning members...”

The article also includes stories of *Crawfish Eddie* and his long-time institution; his shack was swept away in the 1950 hurricane.

The Quarterdeck Club is seen in a aerial photograph of Stiltsville.

Dec. 9, 1959 [15C] Quarterdeck Club is robbed. Story compares it to modern day pirates.

Sept. 6, 1961 [1B] “Colorful Quarterdeck Club Meets a Blazing Death” proclaims a banner headline. Photographs.

“Twenty-one years of checkered history ended in a burst of flames Tuesday for the frequently raided Quarterdeck Club...”

“Little remained except blackened pilings of the *club* that was opened with swank and fanfare in 1940, reputedly in the hope of making it an offshore extension of the wide open gambling then common here.”

“The go-ahead for a big operation never came. But occasional tilting of the lid on gambling led to many police raids therefor everything from quickie crap games to girlie shows and suspected liquor violations.”

“It was something of a social event when the club first opened in 1940.”

“In 1949 while it was under lease to Marty Miles, it came back into the headlines with a raid that netted no slot-machines, and a party that became the talk of the town.”

“Two big sightseeing boats, chartered by a group calling themselves the *Sunshine Boys*, ran aground taking the party-goers home. One fellow came ashore, nude except for a baby pink blanket and gave his name *as Mayor La Guardia*.”

“One merry maker socked a Herald photographer. Another tried to slug a reporter.”

“Warren Freeman, widely known hotel man, took over the place in 1950 and tried to restore its respectability and plush atmosphere. His friends

think he might have put it over, except for the hurricane that battered the place that year and filled it with mud. He gave up.”

“In 1954 the place was back on page one with a raid personally led by Sheriff Tom Kelly. Six men were booked for running a crap game, one was booked on a charge of showing obscene movies, and three women were booked as *vagrants*.”

Oct. 7, 1964 [6A] A nostalgic picture of Miami history; a story about the Quarterdeck Club with photograph.

“Tea dances in the midst of balmy Biscayne Bay, the family yacht tied up alongside, the expectation of perhaps a game of chance - that was the picture that never completely developed for the Quarterdeck Club out on the flats south of Key Biscayne.”

This short article goes on to recount the history of the Quarterdeck Club; it does so in an appealing, interesting story of local folklore and color.

March 7, 1965 [1B] “Bikini Babies Abound in Stiltsville” is the banner headline.

inset box - “Story of a Renegade Village. On mudflats off Key Biscayne, you find a renegade village where there are no taxes or codes. In this report, Staffer Jon Nordheimer tells you about Stiltsville, a weekend retreat for the sophisticated, including a millionaire, developer, business executives, and politicians.”

“Out on the clear blue waters of Biscayne Bay there is a strange place where Pierre is king.”

“In this place, Pierre’s domain, the bikini babies abound. It is called Stiltsville, with varying degrees of respect and dealing and even with dismay.”

“For the unromantic - such as beverage agents - this Bikini Club, the palace, the center of all Stiltsville, is really a very weather beaten yacht, now hard aground thousands yards south of Key Biscayne. For the romantic, it’s a fine new watering hole where you rub shoulders with Miami sophisticates.”

“Pierre says the Bikini Club was once owned by a Hollywood movie mogul. In his eyes it still has a lot of class, a glorious shadow of the past, sitting in the middle of Stiltsville, a cluster of fishing shacks perched on pilings where the bay meets the ocean.”

This is a long article. Pierre is a character; he tries to have an image of being a renegade, spicy. It is a risqué piece, about the illusion of a playboy style club with questionable activities.

The Dade County Mayor visits the club. “Looks like a real nice place,” he said. “First time I’ve been on board. I was curious to see what it looked like inside.”

“One of the mayor’s companions was a millionaire Dade developer who is a mid-bay neighbor of the Bikini Club. ... He owns a nearby house on stilts which he uses - as do all *Stiltsville* owners - as a weekend retreat. He estimates that a half dozen new Stiltsville homes have sprouted on the flats in the shadow of the Cape Florida lighthouse in the past year. The surge of building followed a long period which saw no new construction at all.”

“While officialdom may grumble about the extent of Bikini Club informality, others swear they owe their lives to the existence of the spindly-legged structures in Stiltsville. ...Boaters and fishermen have taken refuge there when sudden squalls caught them by surprise in the middle of the bay.”

“But the future of the Bikini Club and the rest of the area ultimately rests with county and state officials who must decide whether *Stiltsville* is an unsightly, renegade community living outside of the law or whether it is a charming, offbeat change of pace from Miami.”

“Sentiment, unfortunately for Pierre and his mid-bay neighbors, rarely plays a decisive role in these matters.”

March 13, 1965 [2B] The state examines Stiltsville leases. Photograph.

July 25, 1965 [1C] “Agents Leave Bikini Club High, Dry” banner headline. Photographs.

“State Beverage agents crashed the Bikini Club on tranquil Biscayne Bay Saturday and left the mudflat Mecca stripped of its jaunty proprietor known as Pierre, and all refreshments.”

“The Bikini has been the neighborhood bar of Stiltsville, a cluster of spindly-legged shanties south of Cape Florida, for about a year.

July 26, 1965 [1B] headline; “Stiltsville Given a Reprieve As the ‘Clean-Up’ Bogs Down”

“There’s good news today for the salty citizens of Stiltsville.” The state backed off on a planned clean-up of Stiltsville.

“Stiltsville is that cluster of rickety and semi-plush weekend hideaways built on pilings in shoal water just off the southern tip of Key Biscayne.”

“Just how many there are depends upon which weekend you visit the site. Three of the site-occupiers have state leases permitting them to live...”

“The others come and go or are washed away.”

Photographs.

July 26, 1965 [2B] Bikini Club staffers post bail. Interviews with club workers that were arrested and Pierre.

August 11, 1965 [18A] Stiltsville owners will have to sign leases with the state.

August 22, 1965 [1E] “Stiltsville” - large headline, two page article at beginning of Women’s section of Sunday paper. Many photos - Judge Knuck, one of the residents, is prominently featured.

“Getting Away From It In the Stiltsville Way” is the headline on second page.

“Some of the casual-minded residents of a suburban colony of Miamians like to rake up in front of their houses on Sundays. Nothing unusual about that? There is when the ‘lawn’ is Biscayne Bay’s sandy bottom three feet under water.”

“...out at that unique get-away-from-it-all colony called Stiltsville.”

“High in the shallow water in unpretentious-looking frame houses atop barges or pilings within sight of Key Biscayne’s Cape Florida light dwell solid citizens like lawyers and state representatives, policemen and restaurant owners and university professors.”

“We’re a family type colony,” says Judge Knuck, “not a scruffy bunch of squatters. There’s been too much sensational talk about antics at the nearby Bikini Club.”

“Still, the rollicking nearly tax free stilt colony (which doesn’t like to call itself

Stiltsville and is casting about for a classier name) is sort of a Southern counterpart of New York’s Fire Island in the color and diversity of living preferences on view.”

Photographs of houses with captions: “Stiltsville Homes Have Character...
...Some Cost a Tidy Sum... ...With Decor from Rustic... ...To Wall To
Wall Carpeting

This character article presents a picture of a unique, tropical escape from a
positive view point.

(Note: this article is 3 weeks prior to Hurricane Betsy and the later
enforcement of building codes and leases.)

- Sept. 13, 1965 [2B] Hurricane Betsy damages Stiltsville. The Bikini Club is missing its
bow and is listing 20 degrees. The house owned by U.S. Congressman Bill
Lantaff and attorneys Bill Colson and Perry Nichols is still standing.
Jimmy’s Hurricane restaurant owner James Ellenburg’s house and Dade
Circuit Judge Frank Knuck’s house are both gone.
- Sept. 27, 1965 [2C] Hardy Matheson, a Metro commissioner, refers to the “shack and
barge littered sand flats of Biscayne Bay” when he asks the state to keep a
close watch on Stiltsville.
- Sept. 28, 1965 [2B] Dade County begins to enforce building codes on Stiltsville now with
the state’s permission.
- Nov. 12, 1965 [4B] More on Stiltsville hurricane damage and building
codes/permits/leases. Only houses that have over 50% of their structure
remaining are permitted to rebuild after the hurricane.
- July 18, 1966 [1B] Stiltsville’s population increases since November 1965, by 240
percent. A list of lease holders is included.
- Oct. 2, 1966 [1B] The remains of the Bikini Club, formerly the grounded yacht *Jeff*,
burns to the waterline. The club had not reopened since Hurricane Betsy.
- Oct. 19, 1966 [2B] The State Cabinet rejects plans for yacht club at Stiltsville.
- June 4, 1967 [TV Preview] WRIZ’s radio towers are operating at Stiltsville.
Photograph.
- April 7, 1968 [1K] A large two page feature article with many photographs in Sunday’s
Home Section. Headlines:

“Started With Shacks, It Now Has ‘Class’ ”

“Future Growth Of ‘Sea City’ Is Remote”

“Stiltsville No Longer A Community of Shacks”

Photo captions -

“Stiltsville homes have lost some of their ‘chicken-coop’ design in recent years such as the one in foreground with mansard-style roof and shake shingles...”

“This home is perched high and dry above possible hurricane storm tides.”

Excerpts from the article-

“Unofficially dubbed the city of Stiltsville, the weekend retreats are perched atop pilings in the shallow bay waters south of Key Biscayne. But there’s little trace of the pioneering, weather beaten fishing shacks that once dotted the area.”

“In fact, Stiltsville is getting downright toney. When Hurricane Betsy churned up the bay several years ago its salty citizens were forced into an ‘urban renewal program’ that has almost erased the city’s slums.”

“A survey following the 1965 hurricane indicated about six of 20 homes were still standing. But today there are 16 plus a barge or two.”

Nov. 12, 1968 [1B] Advisory Committee on Submerged Land suggests making Biscayne Bay south of Cape Florida a preserve. Photograph of Stiltsville.

Oct. 22, 1969 [24A] South Biscayne Bay is designated an aquatic preserve.

Oct. 26, 1969 The Tropic Magazine of the Sunday Miami Herald features Stiltsville.

“A watering hole for the rich”

“The Bikini Club was the grand palace of Stiltsville, and offered something for everyone... The club’s notoriety grew in proportion to its expanding membership... It wasn’t long before people began calling it a public nuisance and an illegal watering hole for the footloose and the swinging rich. Most of Stiltsville’s leaseholders also opposed the club, claiming it created too much nighttime noise and boat traffic.”

“What kind of people are Stiltsvillians? Over the years the houses have been owned by lawyers, doctors, weekend fishermen, millionaire land developers, small businessmen and several politicians.”

“The seagoing town of Stiltsville has thus far survived all that nature and man has thrown at it, but the toughest attack is yet to come in the form of the proposed aquatic preserve movement.”

Dec. 15, 1974 [1D] Judge Knuck catches thieves entering a neighbor's home in Stiltsville.

June 29, 1975 The Tropic Magazine of the Sunday Miami Herald features Stiltsville. Uses a "playboy" style party of Earl Smalley, one of the residences, as the backdrop.

"It is not exactly inconspicuous, being 17 spindly-legged houses sitting in plain sight of Key Biscayne in a few feet of water... Seventeen houses, most of them just the slightest bit tatty the way second or third homes usually are, are up on pilings sunk expensively 18 feet into bedrock."

"If you flew over Stiltsville - and if you lived there you could probably afford to do so anytime you wanted - you'd see the 17 houses standing there patiently, fairly close together, and you might imagine it is a kind of community, a rich folks' commune where people are all together. Some people even speak of it as a community, and everyone you meet names a different honorary mayor - a post that appears to be awarded arbitrarily and according to private standards. At least there have been named in the press: Jimmy Ellenberg, a Realtor; Judge Francis X. Knuck; and William Daniel, owner of an electrical contracting firm. To the people here today, Smalley is undoubtedly a mayoral figure too. But Stiltsville is not really a community. Each house is a nucleus of activity for the friends and family of its owner, and each style of living is different - some mostly family life, some business and political entertaining, some generalized fantasy fun, like Smalley's place - and while visiting back and forth at dull times is common, or to borrow a jug of whiskey, the visiting is casual and usually short-lived."

Smalley has lived in Stiltsville for about 10 years (since 1965). He remembers seeing the place since he was a boy (1930s, as he was born in early 1920s) when most of the "houses were shacks slapdashed together on old grounded barges."

"There is no telling whether Smalley is a 'typical' Stiltsvillian; probably there is no such thing. He lives pretty much the fantasy life of an adolescent boy or the kind of man who reads *Playboy*: he's rich, still relatively young, and he does what he likes."

"It wouldn't be half so much fun for him, one suspects, if he had to live without Stiltsville. Stiltsville grew up after WWII, the shacks and peeling frame houses popping up on the sunken barges. Nobody knew much about it for a time, or cared, and then Key Biscayne was being developed in the 1950s and new residents began complaining about what an eyesore it was out there, and how the Stiltsville people weren't paying property taxes. They were just squatters, the complainers said. After awhile the State of

Florida got tired of hearing it and was prepared to force the squatters out ... Hurricane Betsy, in 1966, ... clean[ed] house. She swept much of Stiltsville away.”

The state used the storm to their advantage to prevent the issuance of new building permits and decreed that houses that suffered 50% damage could not be rebuilt.

It was hard to judge what was considered to be 50% damage though. Many residents had the money to rebuild and others had the know how.

17 houses were allowed to stay in 1966 after the hurricane.

By 1975, since Biscayne Bay is now an aquatic preserve, the residents have had to clean up their act. Early residents did not care about pollution, etc., now they have holding tanks for sewage. People used to throw garbage over the side, but by 1975, they are now concerned with the cleanliness of the area.

“Stiltsville first became famous in 1962 when a man who called himself Plucky Pierre towed a beat-up yacht to the shallows, named it the Bikini Club, and started serving booze and encouraging the presence of bikinied ladies, a pair of attractions which encouraged the presence of customers - many of whom were big in the political and social worlds.”

(This article does not consider the fame of the Quarterdeck Club, which became famous well before the Bikini Club. The Quarterdeck Club opened in 1940 and burned down in 61, one year prior to the opening of the Bikini Club.)

This was a private social club that circumvented the liquor laws. It was a club with the reputation of being a hangout for the swinging rich. Pierre, the owner, claimed to have a membership of 1,300.

Other Stiltsville residents complained about the noise.

Summer 1965, State Beverage Dept. raided Bikini Club. Hurricane Betsy destroyed club in 1965.

[In 1975] “Now the raffish old days are gone, or the raffishness is confined to private houses.” Judge Knuck says, “We’re a family-type colony, not a scruffy bunch of squatters. The neighborhood has changed radically in the past few years. Now it looks like Millionaire’s Row.”

“It is hard to learn exactly who owns the Stiltsville houses. Like Smalley, many Stiltsvillians seem to feel it is bad taste to mention names. But many are powerful people with solid political connections. “I’d say most are prominent, Smalley says.”
